

## Attracted to wild heart

By Shelley Corbin, Contributor to the  
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The well-known American poet Emily Dickinson is the namesake of the protagonist in *Stalking the Wild Heart*, the mysterious and beautiful new novel by Deanna Barnhardt Kawatski.

Struck by an immense tragedy in her young life, the Canadian Emily strikes out in a search to recapture her past, only to realize that in order to live fully, she must learn to let it go.

Like her namesake, this Emily is highly sensitive, keenly attuned to nature, unpredictably independent in her thinking, and stubbornly true to her often unorthodox convictions.

Needless to say, these personal characteristics, combined with a compelling need to write, ensure that she embarks upon a very steep path to maturity.

As we accompany Emily in her exploration of a rugged and still-pristine northern landscape so finely rendered by Barnhardt Kawatski's deeply sensory descriptions, we also share the heart-rending inner struggle of a young woman's determination to become her own person.

*Stalking the Wild Heart* is a unique and very intimate novel in that it is composed almost entirely of the journal entries of two major voices, Emily and Rachel. Although their lives have taken vastly different courses in the outer world, the lifelong friends remain linked at a heart level.

The journal entries move through a 12-year period, the various locations of each woman's entry often ranging widely from the other's, especially in the first few years.

The extroverted Rachel's travels take her all over Europe and, finally, south to sun-drenched, Muslim Morocco where she comes to terms with where her future really lies.

The more introverted Emily finds her challenges much closer to home in the mountain forests of the northern British Columbia wilderness she loves, and in the deepest valleys of her own soul.

Eventually, the narrative strands converge as each woman is drawn back to the little town of Hawkstone, and finally to Loon Lake, where everything both ended and began for Emily.



**Great Read:** Deanna Barnhardt Kawatski signs copies of her new book, *Stalking the Wild Heart*.

It is here that the false starts and inconsistent threads of Emily's story can hold together no longer, and we see her personal life begin to unravel.

Barnhardt Kawatski deals with major themes in this finely crafted and gripping tour de force: the preservation of the wild beauty of nature, and the struggle against man's attempts to control her; the selfish and frequently cruel nature of human ambition; the subjugation and abuse of women; the devastation incurred by loss and death and the unstoppable power of love.

The author expertly weaves these highly textured themes into a vibrant tapestry of images, sounds, smells, tastes and sensations so evocative that the reader gets the message almost as if by osmosis, just as in real life.

*Stalking the Wild Heart* begins magnificently in 1956 by intertwining a portion of an Emily Dickinson poem called *A Thunderstorm* with a tragic loss in six-year-old Emily's life. It ends 27 years later with a second loss eerily similar to the first.

Perhaps a portion of another Dickinson poem called *Hope is the Thing with Feathers* might help us to understand how Emily finds the strength to go on.

Could the long-sought, almost mythological blue-breasted waterwill be the "thing with feathers" that sustains her?